

Insight and Outlook By Joseph Kraft

Wilson's Visit *Past 12/15/65*

LONDON—"To be out of the House," Lord Chesterfield once wrote of Parliament, "is to be out of the world." But that was in the 18th Century.

Now it seems that to be in the House is to be out of the world. For the thrust of politics here is toward a gross enlargement of the role Britain can effectively



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play in international affairs. And the exaggeration will find new expression in Prime Minister Harold Wilson's coming visit to the United Nations and the White House.

The obvious case in point is Rhodesia. It is the never-ending subject of conversation and argument on the dinner circuit and in the Commons. Wilson has been out to Rhodesia on a flying visit. He has put the issue to the British nation in a TV broadcast. He has brought in the name of the Queen.

No doubt a certain importance attaches to the efforts of 200,000 white settlers to maintain indefinite supremacy over 4 million black natives. This country's relations with all other Commonwealth countries are involved. So is the long, magnificent record of peacefully unwinding empire. Copper supplies are at stake and there may be implications for race relations here in Britain. Even so, Rhodesia is not exactly fulcrum of world politics. In fact, the real reason it has come center stage has much more to do with the facts of domestic than with those of foreign policy.

FOR WILSON, Rhodesia is a heaven-sent opportunity. He wraps himself in the mantle of statesman making portentous moves on the board of world diplomacy.

He knits up Socialist bonds with Queen and Commonwealth. As a defender of the black Rhodesians, he even has a bone to throw his unhappy left-wing back benchers.

For the Tories, by the same token, Rhodesia is a political disaster. It draws attention from the effort by a new leader, Edward Heath, to modernize the party and concentrate its focus on Europe. It divides the party leadership from the imperialist die-hards who side with the Rhodesian whites. And, worst of all, it belies the claim that Wilson is a little man, lacking the strength and stature to be a fit leader of modern Britain.

IN THESE conditions, Wilson is bound to use his American trip to enlarge his position in the world. At the United Nations he will probably plunge deeper than ever into the Rhodesian affair. And in Washington he is likely, in many ways, to seek the President's support for his new commitments.

For a starter, he is going to want more backing on Rhodesia. This might include a verbal endorsement of his stand by the White House. American willingness to participate in the embargo on purchase of Rhodesian goods and perhaps even some kind of American promise to airlift British troops and supplies to Rhodesia in the event of serious violence.

Next, Wilson will probably

want to firm up Britain's role as a power east of Suez. For the past year his government has been conducting a defense review designed to scale down British expenditures and bring her forces into line with her commitments.

The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, and Defense Minister Denis Healey, all seem to feel that Britain should maintain important defense forces around the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and Malaysia. But, there is considerable opposition to this view inside the Cabinet and the Labor Party. For the purposes of swinging round his own government, Wilson would probably like a presidential endorsement of Britain's role east of Suez and maybe even some sharing of costs. To that end, he has been, and will continue to be, a vocal supporter of the American effort in Vietnam.

As to Europe, Wilson comes more to bury than to praise. London believes that West Germany can be satisfied, and the possibility of dealing with Moscow on disarmament preserved, if only, there is no action besides setting up the proposed McNamara Committee for allied nuclear consultation. And the sad result is that the focus of attention on Asia and Africa draws energy away from the area with the richest possibilities for helping all men—that is from Anglo-American collaboration with Europe.